

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L USUN 4647

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CI, PFOR

SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH FORMER CHILEAN PRESIDENT

EDUARDO FREI

1. IN CONVERSATION WITH AMB WHITE AT SMALL PRIVATE DINNER OCT 31, FORMER PRESIDENT FREI SPOKE OF CONDITIONS IN CHILE AND CURRENT IMPRESSIONS OF US.

2. FREI IS HERE ON A VISIT WITH WIFE AND DAUGHTER, HAVING FLOWN TO MIAMI AND RENTED A CAR FOR TRIP UP EAST COAST. HE HAS BEEN MEETING ONLY IN SMALL INFORMAL GROUPS AND GIVING NO PRESS INTERVIEWS, FOR FEAR HE OTHERWISE MIGHT NOT BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO CHILE.

3. FREI SAID HE WAS ENJOYING TRIP TROROUGHLY, FINDING IT REFRESHING AND A WELCOME CHANGE. HE WAS CRITICAL OF MUCH OVER-SIMPLIFICATION OF CHILEAN SITUATION IN AMERICAN OPINION, ESPECIALLY IN MEDIA, AND DECRIED TENDENCY OF MANY TO GLORIFY ALLENDE REGIME SIMPLY BECAUSE OF SINS OF ITS SUCCESSOR. (HE REMARKED, HOWEVER, THAT IN THE UNIVERSITIES HE MET A NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO ARE EXTREMELY WELL INFORMED ABOUT CHILE.) HE FURTHER COMMENTED WITH SOME SPIRIT ON NAIVETE OF AMERICANS IN OBJECTING TO US ASSISTANCE TO OPPOSITION NEWSPAPERS

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DURING ALLENDE ERA, WHEN ALLENDE HIMSELF WAS RECEIVING

MASSIVE ASSISTANCE FROM COMMUNIST COUNTRIES.

4. FREI DEPICTED PRESENT CHILEAN SITUATION IN BLEAK TERMS. FEAR IS EVER-PRESENT, HE SAID, AND FREE EXPRESSION IN ANY PUBLIC SENSE STIFLED. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ARE APPALLING, WITH HUGE RISE IN COST OF IMPORTS (ESPECIALLY PETROLEUM, FERTILIZER, FOODSTUFFS), CONTRASTED WITH LOWERED PRICE OF COPPER EXPORTS. THE MIDDLE CLASS IS SUFFERING EVEN MORE THAN UNDER ALLENDE ("THE COUNTRY IS PAYING FOR HIS POLICIES.")

5. ON PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD THE JUNTA, FREI SAID OF COURSE IT WAS DIFFICULT TO JUDGE UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS, BUT OFFERED FOLLOWING ROUGH ESTIMATE; AT TIME OF COUP, AT LEAST 75 PERCENT OF COUNTRY FAVORED THE JUNTA; SINCE THAT TIME, SUPPORT HAS DROPPED TO 50 PERCENT; HOWEVER, IF THERE SEEMED TO BE A CLEAR DANGER OF RETURNING TO ALLENDE-TYPE REGIME, SUPPORT WOULD PROBABLY RISE TO AROUND 65 PERCENT.

6. FREI'S MOOD SEEMED ONE OF RESIGNATION AND REALISM. HE DID MAINTAIN THAT EVENTUALLY MOVES TOWARD LIBERALIZATION WOULD HAVE TO COME, BUT HE INDICATED NEITHER HOW NOR WHEN THIS MIGHT HAPPEN.

7. HE SPOKE WARMLY OF AMB POPPER.
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